



## Construction project management fiction: Individual values

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## Construction project management fiction: Individual values

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## ABSTRACT

Works of fiction are used in organizational studies for pedagogical purposes and as sources of data. The aim here is to analyse fictional treatments of construction project management, with a focus on project managers' individual values. Fourteen novels, two short stories and four plays are included. Among the 18+18 individual Rokeach values, imagination, love, ambition, courage and happiness are frequently highlighted by authors. Earlier research on project managers has not shown imagination and love to be important. Studying fiction offers a broader representation of human aspects of project work, such as unethical behaviour, than can be gained from biographies, interviews and questionnaires. Works of literature can be used for more than pedagogical purposes. The relation between project managers' project commitments and their personal ties outside the project context is a recurring topic in fiction.

## 1. Introduction

Researchers are increasingly aware of the potential for many interpretations of the concept of project value. An intriguing task is to link project value, however defined, to the psychological concept of individual values in the sense of deeply held beliefs about ideal modes of conduct and ideal terminal goals (Rokeach, 1973). This linkage should be of particular importance when striving to develop a shared understanding among project stakeholders (Zhang and El-Gohary, 2016; Martinsuo, 2020; Bahadorestani et al., 2020). Organization-stakeholder fit can be thought of as a matter of both value congruence and strategic complementarity, seen as “a mutual provision of resources to satisfy strategic needs” (Bundy et al., 2018). Value congruence is then understood as promoting character-based trust between partners, relational predictability, mutual liking and affinity as well as socioemotional communication. Investigating stakeholder values is complicated, however, because some stakeholders are organizations, and others are individuals; the values espoused by an organization are not just an aggregation of individual values (Bourne et al., 2019). A simpler first step of analysis is to concentrate on individually held values and to begin with a focus on project managers, while acknowledging that they operate in stakeholder contexts.

Instead of empirical study based on questionnaire surveys of project managers, there is the alternative of probing fictional texts. That fictional literature can be relevant to organizational studies has been recognized widely since the anthology edited by Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux (1994). While the anthology emphasized the pedagogical use of works of fiction, it was soon claimed that imagina-

tive literature could be treated as a resource for organizational studies (Phillips, 1995; De Cock & Land, 2006) and as a source of data to better understand organizational life (Whiteman & Phillips, 2008). More recently, it has been said that novels can force us to “look beyond more static and rationalistic perceptions on organizations” (Grafström & Jonsson, 2019). Compared to questionnaires and interviews as sources, fiction allows us to explore ethical dilemmas faced by project managers and also to gain insights into less desirable managerial behaviours.

It is unclear why project management researchers have abstained from tapping into literary fiction with plots evolving in temporary organizations, although it is accepted that project management practice can be seen as a social conduct, defined by history, context, individual values and wider structural frameworks (Cicmil et al., 2006). Seen in a wider historical perspective, the important type of temporary organizations has been construction projects (Garel, 2013). As is well known, construction projects and also construction project management are characterized by process duration, risk and uncertainty (geology, availability of resources, safety/accidents), irreversibility, potential for negative environmental impacts, as well as being affected by uncertain environmental effects (weather, earthquakes), and they are strongly localized. Usually there are many organizations linked by project contracts, and projects have a number of unique features. Construction projects illustrate aspects of project complexity found in many other types of projects (Bakhshi et al., 2016). Within construction, there is a diversity of types: major infrastructure projects are different from housebuilding, given their scale of investment, visibility to the public, who will typically be users of the project outcome, public sector involvement and many stakeholders (Martinsuo et al., 2019).

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Given this situation, the aim of the present investigation is to analyse fictional treatments of construction project management. More precisely, the research question is how novels, short stories and plays reflect individual values held by construction project managers. Here, it should be noted that construction project manager is a term that may refer to a range of functions. Managers of construction projects (Meng & Boyd, 2017) can be top managers or lower in a project hierarchy; the differentiation between developers, architects and managers employed by construction contractors is recent and professions develop over time (Shen & Jensen, 2011).

Answering the research question involves first an overview of how fiction has been treated in organizational studies, followed by prior research on project manager values and on methods for extracting individual values from narratives. This provides a basis for a description of the method applied in the present investigation, where the list of individual values developed by Rokeach (1973) is fundamental. A total of twenty works of fiction (novels, short stories and plays) related to construction project management are identified, and the individual values are analysed. Finally, as part of the conclusion, there are brief suggestions for a research agenda.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Fiction in organizational studies

Fiction and literature are not exact synonyms; fundamentally, there is literature that is not fiction, and there is fiction that is not literature (Searle, 1975). Research on non-literature storytelling and sense-making within organizations has expanded greatly since the 1970s (Boje, 1991; Enninga & van der Lugt, 2016; Beigi et al., 2019), but has generated less interest in applications within the construction industry (Leung & Fong, 2011). Fictional treatments offer an alternative way to understand what project managers do in “actual” or rather imagined project situations.

Preceding the 1994 anthology edited by Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux 1994, Waldo (1968) and McCurdy (1973) had started investigating fiction with a narrow focus on public administration contexts. Early examples of fictional literature that have been analysed for their organizational content include C.P. Snow's *Strangers and Brothers* (Grey, 1996). Phillips and Zyglidopoulos (1999) investigated Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy, De Cock (2000) mined short stories by Borges, and Patient et al. (2003) studied workplace envy with a narrative analysis of the role of envy in excerpts from Russo's 1997 novel *Straight Man*. They contended that novels and short stories “can provide direct access to characters' real-time emotional experiences, with detail, nuance, and subtlety”.

Czarniawska (2009) discussed the study of anthropology of organizations through a Polish novel, *Zwał*, and Richard Powers' *Gain* as examples. Here, inspiration was provided by Moretti's concept of distant reading of many literary works, as opposed to close reading of just a few. She made five observations concerning how literature may inspire organization theory: novels can be seen as quasi-ethnographies to be treated almost as sources; it is possible to concentrate on the plot, understood as theories embedded in a novel. Furthermore, reading novels “in more nuanced ways” might help reading fieldwork material in similar ways, and sensitize organization theorists also to the issue of form. It could be said, however, that using novels as fieldwork material impoverishes them. Earlier, Czarniawska (2006) listed several reasons why fieldwork is difficult when attempting to study gender discrimination in organizations, and as a consequence, fiction such as Paretzky's detective stories can serve as a kind of field material. How five novels by women authors connected the concepts of gender, leadership and sustainability has been investigated by Marshall (2011). In her later analysis of seven detective stories written by Giménez Bartlett with Petra Delgado as the female protagonist, Czarniawska (2020) has restated why organization scholars should engage with fiction and film. These fictional treatments

allow following practices where time differences and access make fieldwork difficult, they offer insights into human nature; permit thought experiments, and they offer a “list of contemporary societal problems [...] at least partly different from that provided by the media”. Also, realist style fiction exemplifies “what writing well means”.

The hierarchical distance in bureaucratic organizations is what McCabe (2015) analyses relying on Kafka, whose 1925 novel *The Trial* had been brought up already by Cohen (1998). Also Beyes et al. (2019) have chosen to refer to Kafka, adding Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*. Reading lists supporting organizational studies have been created such as the one by Michaelson (2017) for business ethics education, but among the twelve novels included there, none is about a construction project – or any type of project, unless Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* counts as one. When Holt and Zundel (2018) argue that “fictional accounts can generate insights into aspects of organizational and social life more effectively than conventional methods”, their analysis of a television crime series is still presented by them as an example of unconventional methods in organization and management research. Novels can delve into complex or “wicked problems” in society (Gouthro, 2019). For family business research, literary fiction has been understood to capture important phenomena that may be difficult to access through other forms of empirical material; Nordqvist and Gartner (2020) look at *Buddenbrooks*, *King Lear* as well as *Henry IV (Parts 1 and 2)* as fictions that might be useful for family business scholarship.

Awareness of the importance of the tacit in project work (van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2019) could be strengthened by access to fictional treatments functioning as vicarious “lived experiences”. When Floris and Cuganesan (2019) talk about “expanding one's capacity to deal with cognitive and emotional complexity” and the role of “iconic moments, which provide insights into how project dealers develop”, it is reasonable to suggest an alternative or rather complementary path to insights.

Despite Shakespeare's elaborate metaphor of building in *Henry IV Part 2* (detailed analysis by Eriksen, 2001), which emphasizes the value of prudence, not many fiction writers have been tempted to base their narratives on construction projects. Nevertheless, works of fiction usually provide evidence for both the author's value system and those of the characters in a more obvious way than for participants in real life construction projects. When developing a broader understanding of how individuals' values affect projects, literary treatments of construction can be analysed. The Tower of Babel and what a total breakdown of communication between project participants means is recognized and interpreted also in symbolic terms by Kaghan and Phillips (1998).

It should not be forgotten that the current way of publishing qualitative organizational research contains strong elements associated with fiction (Rhodes & Brown, 2005). Savage et al. (2018) go even further in dismantling the barriers between reality and fiction, inspired primarily by Ricœur, when they make the radical assertion that organizations are fiction “constructed through speech acts, props and narration, based on more general acts of pretence or make believe – for a purpose”. Most project management researchers probably hesitate to go as far as that.

### 2.2. Project histories in organizational studies

Non-fiction historical narratives related to construction project management usually include at least elements of managerial biography. Major personalities such as Brassey, Aird, Cowdray and Norton-Griffiths were portrayed by Middlemas (1963), followed by Turner (1992) for Scott, Chrimes (1994) for McIntosh. Shapira and Berndt (1997) analysed six “grand-scale” construction projects, starting with the Brooklyn Bridge in 1864, with a focus on managerial risk-taking. Brunel's Thames tunnel project has been analysed by Marshall and Bresnen (2013), warning that different perspectives on project management might not add up to a “more faithful and complete representation of the complexities of ‘real’ projects”. Brunelleschi's Florence Duomo project four centuries earlier has been used for identifying drivers of project management success (Kozak-Holland & Procter, 2014).

**Table 1**Rokeach terminal values: authors and quotation examples (*italics for inverse value*).

Terminal values	Author(s), quotation examples
True Friendship	'my friend' (Aristophanes), 'would hurt his assistant not a little' (Kipling), Paasilinna
Mature Love	'The life they led together seemed to him beautiful' (Cather), 'And we two are bound together' (Goethe), Guillou, 'he has been all the world to her' (Lagerlöf), Paasilinna, Pontoppidan, 'You shall be my wife' (Strindberg), 'I want you for my wife' (Wright)
Self-Respect	'with confident authority' (Andrić), 'Say what you like; he's proud' (Golding), 'I will never give way to anybody' (Ibsen), Paasilinna
Happiness	'thrice happy (trismakári)' (Aristophanes), 'he would be destroying himself and his own happiness' (Cather), 'He was laughing, chin up' (Golding), 'this happiness was not to be bought any cheaper' (Ibsen), 'immensely grateful' (Kipling), Paasilinna, ' <i>he had not wanted to be happy</i> ' (Pontoppidan), 'happy with the profession that I exercise' (Reinhardt), 'fell on his knees and thanked God' (Strindberg)
Inner Harmony	' <i>not to Harmony</i> ' (Ackroyd), ' <i>peace is where I am not</i> ' (Cather), Paasilinna, ' <i>our own true self becomes the Great Sphinx</i> ' (Pontoppidan)
Equality	Paasilinna
Freedom	'success would bring him freedom' (Cather), den Doolaard, 'Even now I've not won my liberty' (Goethe), 'I will be a free builder' (Ibsen), Paasilinna, 'dream of a proud and free roving life' (Pontoppidan)
Pleasure	'it is beautiful here' (Bang)
Social Recognition	Bang, ' <i>not willing to become what is called a public man</i> ' (Cather), 'he dreamed of a C.S.I.' (Kipling), Paasilinna
Wisdom	'greatest among the wise and great' (Andrić), 'caution (eulábeia) saves everything' (Aristophanes), 'the difficult art of being small' (Bang), 'When we mean to build, We first survey the plot, then draw the model; And when we see the figure of the house, Then must we rate the cost of the erection; Which if we find out weighs ability, What do we then but draw anew the model In fewer offices, or at last desist To build at all?' (Shakespeare)
Salvation	Ackroyd, '[the angels] snatched it away' (Goethe)
Family Security	-
National Security	Boulle, den Doolaard, 'Let me make room for many a million, Not wholly secure' (Goethe), 'Public utility must be the first consideration' (Wright)
A Sense of Accomplishment	'all that was accomplished in these one and a half years' (Bang), 'achieved my course' (Goethe), 'The bridge is mine' (Kipling), 'she had finally won a victory' (Lagerlöf), Paasilinna, 'was content to follow my projects until delivery' (Reinhardt), 'fell down on their knees and sang the "Te Deum laudamus"' (Strindberg)
A World of Beauty	' <i>not to [...] Rationall Beauty</i> ' (-Ackroyd), 'give the Nordic countries an art from the scene' (Bang), 'dreamed that she had been married to the noblest man in beautiful Sicily' (Lagerlöf)
A World at Peace	'long life, peace, youth' (Aristophanes), 'War again! The wise man hates it when it comes' (Goethe), 'it has become calm and peaceful on Etna' (Lagerlöf)
A Comfortable Life	-
An Exciting Life	'life was activity' (Cather), 'life, full of adventures and thrilling events' (Pontoppidan)

Sankaran (2018) has analysed narratives in six biographies, including autobiographies, and identified strategies and leadership themes in life stories of four megaproject managers. Autobiography is however a literary genre with an inescapable element of fiction (Gilmore, 2001, p. 47). In a study of narrative capital and meaning making in projects (Carlsen & Pitsis, 2020), narrative capital is emphasized as a "largely positive phenomenon", although it is mentioned that stories might lack openness, potentially inauthentic and even shaming since projects may evolve into symbols of failure. Life stories can also be gathered through interviews, as Drouin et al. (2021) have done by interviewing 14 megaproject managers: what their personal views are, how these have influenced their leadership, and what they perceive as successful lessons learned.

### 2.3. Project managers and their values

The chosen focus here is on project manager values, applying the categories established by Rokeach (1973) to a set of works of literature. He defined a value as an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. For an individual, it is a standard for guiding action, for developing and maintaining attitudes toward relevant objects and situations, for justifying one's own and other's actions and attitudes, for morally judging self and others, and for comparing self with others. He operated with two types of values: "modes of conduct" and "end states of existence". Instrumental values are understood as modes of conduct, serving as means for achieving terminal (end state) values. Terminal values are moral (interpersonal) values and competence (personal) values. Violating moral values arouses pangs of guilt, while violating competence values creates feelings of shame about personal inadequacy rather than feelings of guilt. The eighteen terminal values are listed in Table 1 and the eighteen instrumental values in Table 2.

The values identified by Rokeach have been criticized for being mostly a list of unconnected value words without an underlying theory of system structure (Rohan, 2000). This is not necessarily a problem when analysing fictional texts. An alternative integrated value system has been developed by Schwartz; in its revised version (Schwartz et al., 2012), 19 values form a circular motivational continuum based on their compatible and conflicting motivations, expression of self-protection versus growth, and personal versus social focus.

While personal values can be seen as learned adaptations strongly influenced by the environment, personality traits are largely endogenous characteristics (Olver & Mooradian, 2003). Thus, personality traits would be antecedent to values, which can be reprioritized because of experience and social expectations. For personality traits, the main systems are the Myers-Briggs personality type indicator with 16 types, used by Cohen et al. (2013) in a survey of 280 managers linking their personality types to their success in project management, and the Big Five model (Goldberg, 1992), followed by the six-dimensional HEXACO model (Lee & Ashton, 2004). It is possible that a shift of scholarly interest toward personality traits can be explained by the latent nature of the construct of values (Rohan, 2000). It has been difficult, however, to find stable and clear relationships between individual values and personalities, although there is a notably stronger relation between individual values and emotional intelligence (Higgs & Liechtenstein, 2011). Writers on authentic leadership (Gardner et al., 2011) have often defined it with reference to self-awareness of individual values.

Rokeach values have been fundamental to a number of studies of project management, including construction. Wang et al. (2017) found that the performance of construction project managers could be enhanced by promoting motivators that agree with their human values. Reducing a list of twenty motivators, they obtained six motivating factors from US questionnaire data. Correlations among the 18 human values (Rokeach's instrumental values) indicated high covariation between ambitious and courageous, ambitious and responsible, respon-

**Table 2**Rokeach instrumental values: authors and quotation examples (*italics for inverse value*).

Instrumental values	Author(s), quotation examples
Cheerfulness	'Sorrow. <i>The Nourishment of the World</i> ' (Ackroyd), 'the clattering of shovels cheers me' (Goethe), Paasilinna
Ambition	'My Churches will endure' (Ackroyd), 'damned need for action in this country' (Bang), 'most important piece of bridge-building going on in the world' (Cather), 'We'll attempt what's astonishing' (Goethe), Golding, 'will is to reach the top' (Ibsen), 'made a hard life worth the living' (Kipling), 'a conqueror' (Pontoppidan), Reinhardt, 'tortured by the idea that the two tunnels would never meet' (Strindberg)
Love	' <i>four years' attempt to feel love</i> ' (Bang), 'not realized that he was in love' (Cather), 'mode of life where all love is good' (Golding), Guillo, 'I cannot get on without you' (Ibsen), 'she was to live and love' (Lagerlöf), Paasilinna, Reinhardt, 'approached the prettiest girl' (Strindberg)
Cleanliness	-
Self-Control	'a reserv'd Disposition – like to my own' (Ackroyd)
Capability	'we've got our own methods' (Boulle), 'instituted reforms all over the islands' (Cather), Guillo, Kipling, Pontoppidan, 'a great talent' (Reinhardt), 'experience with large corporations' (Wright)
Courage	'had nothing to be afraid of' (Andrić), den Doolaard, 'the daring of my favoured plan' (Goethe), 'Courage. Glory be. It is a final beginning' (Golding), Guillo, 'daren't climb to the top' (Ibsen), Lagerlöf, Paasilinna, 'sang the song of the three men in the fiery furnace' (Strindberg)
Politeness	' <i>Are you so wooden-headed</i> ' (Ackroyd), 'politely asked her to open' (Strindberg)
Honesty	' <i>veil my Intention</i> ' (Ackroyd), 'honest man' (Andrić), 'is meant sincerely' (Boulle), Cather, ' <i>to cheat, to lie</i> ' (Lynde), Paasilinna.
Imagination	Ackroyd, Aristophanes, 'he dreamed with a smile' (Bang), 'through my mind, leapt plan after plan' (Goethe), 'screaming down at Jocelin and his folly' (Golding), 'castles in the air' (Ibsen), Kipling, 'thought now of one, now of another enterprise, on which she wished to embark' (Lagerlöf), 'his imagination ranged freely' (Pontoppidan), 'conceived revolutionary dwellings' (Reinhardt), 'a larger thinking and planning and dreaming' (Wright)
Independence	'Hast[e] is for Fools' (Ackroyd), Goethe, Paasilinna, Pontoppidan
Intellect	Ackroyd, 'work so interlocked and complex' (Andrić), 'his theoretical knowledge enabled him' (Boulle), Goethe, 'immensely complex plan' (Kipling), Pontoppidan
Broad-Mindedness	Paasilinna
Logic	'a detailed plan' (Boulle)
Obedience	'In obedience to your orders' (Ackroyd), 'They hold me to the scale I've used in shorter bridges' (Cather), 'Freely and loyally' (Goethe), 'His services as a civil engineer belonged wholly to those who bought them for their own profit' (Wright)
Helpfulness	'you can count on me' (Boulle), Paasilinna
Responsibility	'with responsibility almost too top-heavy' (Kipling), 'who alone would carry the tallest tower in France on my back' (Reinhardt)
Forgiveness	-

sible and honest, broadminded and helpful, polite and helpful, capable and independent. Correlations ( $>0.4$ ) between the six motivating factors and the 18 values showed that helpful and defence, capable and dominance, helpful & loving with deference were related. Again relying on Rokeach's 18 instrumental values, the relationship between civil engineers' demographics (such as age, marital status, education, work experience) and their personal values has been explored by Damci et al. (2017).

Depending on both Rokeach and Schwartz, Song and Gale (2008) earlier made repertory grid interviews in the Chinese construction industry to investigate project managers' work values and their relationship to competence. This value system has also been applied to studying construction sustainability (Fellows & Liu, 2008). The same early ten-value version of Schwartz' value system has been used for case studies of values in construction organizations (Mills et al., 2009), for analysing project stakeholder values (Mills & Austin, 2014) and more recently for studying the relation between individual values and sustainability in a major UK infrastructure project (Rickaby et al., 2020).

Value systems can be construed in ethical terms. Rokeach (1973) asserted that his 18 instrumental values could be classified as moral values or competence values, and Weber (2015), applying Rokeach's scheme, found that managerial value orientations have shifted since the late 1980s, "with more managers emphasizing a moral value orientation than previously". It can be argued that many of the Rokeach values correspond to virtues expressed by Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics (Wang & Hackett, 2020). Considering ethical decision making in organizations, Crossan et al. (2013) have articulated a virtue ethical framework, and Aristotelian virtues are brought into the picture when answering the question of what constitutes a 'good' project manager (Bredillet et al., 2015). Fiction is seldom used, but when Ljungblom and Lennerfors (2018) argue for virtue ethics for project managers, they analyse how project managers and students react to three fictive accounts of unethical behaviour. A similar approach has been followed

by Yokouchi et al. (2017) for exploring moral values in procurement of infrastructure projects.

There is a lack of empirical studies of ethical decision making in the construction industry, where there is a potential for conflicts between individual values, organizational values and values held by the surrounding society (Ho, 2011). This underlines the importance of considering an alternative approach to individual values, viewing them in their social and cultural context. Cultural theory assumes that there are four individual worldviews or biases (hierarchical, egalitarian, individualistic, and fatalistic); Thompson et al. (1990, p. 96) offer Galt's Gulch in Ayn Rand's 1957 *Atlas Shrugged* as an example of individualistic bias. Although an early application of cultural theory has been behaviour under risk (Douglas & Wildawsky, 1982), little interest among project management researchers has been evoked. An exception with particular relevance to stakeholder management is when Conner et al. (2016) argue that an individual's deep core values, as identified by cultural theory, shape their motivations to collaborate. This is then seen to translate into managerial behaviour, "including how much time is dedicated to networking activities compared to internal management, the way in which managers collaborate and whom public officials choose to involve in networks". A number of Rokeach values (Courage, Imagination, Independence, Obedience; Self-Respect, Equality, Freedom) appear to be closely related to the four worldviews in cultural theory.

#### 2.4. Extracting values from narratives

Project manager biographies, based on available documentation, often give glimpses of values believed to have been held by those portrayed. In their analysis of six construction projects, Shapiro and Berndt (1997) describe their managers using words such as (to take a few examples) confident, not overly concerned with consensus building, pragmatic, showing sentimentality, intensity, wishing to earn a place in history, charm, aggressive, shrewd. From interviews with project leaders who recount their personal life stories, as in Drouin's (2021) case of the



life story of a top manager involved in a megaproject in Vancouver, values can be identified, in this case reported as Team Spirit and Solidarity, Integrity, Honesty and Humility. Interviews have to be analysed with care, considering that social desirability response bias (Huang et al., 1998) is known to affect the validity even of anonymous questionnaires concerning individual values, and yet survey results are conventionally treated by project management researchers as lacking bias. On the other hand, reliance on fictional characters has been questioned in psychology as involving “flawed empirical method” (Oatley, 1999), but that does not necessarily imply that project management should reject fiction as a source of insights.

An early use of Rokeach's value system for an analysis of old texts was for author attribution of twelve Federalist papers (Rokeach et al., 1970). The value categories proposed by Rokeach were then applied by Lester (1982) as a template to characters in seven short stories, employing four readers as analysts and preparing a list of synonyms for each individual value. Historically, literary treatment of the relation between projects and individual psychology starts already with the *Iliad*, where Agamemnon, leading the project to capture Troy, causes a ten-year delay by his unethical treatment of a key warrior, Achilles, who then refuses to collaborate. Already in the first verse of the *Iliad*, Homer declares that the topic of the epic is wrath, not war. Passakos and De Raad (2009) searched the more than 15,000 verses of the *Iliad* for epithets referring to mortals or immortals, finding a total number of 1,713 epithets. Subsequently, trait-like epithets were mapped against the Big Five factors of personality.

The choice of method for extracting individual values or personality traits from literary texts depends on the volume of text to be analysed, whether there is digital access to a corpus of texts, and the style of writing to be expected. Intensive methods of analysis are best applied to short texts, single works of fiction or excerpts from longer texts. Downloading texts from the *gutenberg.com* database, Fischer et al. (2020) focus on how Jane Austen and Charles Dickens understood and described human personality, applying a bottom-up computational approach to extract personality dimensions used by the two authors to describe fictional characters in 21 novels. They found that factor structures did not show strong convergence with the Big Five model. Also recently, Kalkman (2020) has applied grounded theory and constant comparative comparisons to four war novels in order to study sense-making in crisis situations. Such methods are possible to use on shorter excerpts of a small number of literary texts. If the intention is to analyse the full texts of a much greater number of works of fiction, they must be available digitally, and the search strategy will be confined to a limited set of words: mining the Google Books corpus and other huge databases of fiction, Moretti (2013) has analysed nineteenth century literature, tracing bourgeois values in keywords such as “useful”, “comfort”, “efficiency” and “seriousness”. Regardless of the volume of texts, there are many pitfalls associated with simple searches: irony is difficult to detect, and it is necessary to distinguish between values held by characters, narrators and the author (Altes, 2014). The analysis of works of fiction therefore requires interpretative skills of a higher degree than when coding less sophisticated texts such as newspaper articles (Martinsuo et al., 2019). Going further and applying artificial intelligence, Ishita et al. (2019) present a three-stage model for automated annotation of human values as found in selected text spans, identifying value sentences and fact sentences in a corpus of newspaper editorials reflecting the nuclear power debate in Japan.

It is unlikely that an author of fiction uses words that are identical to Rokeach's own labels assigned to the 18+18 values in his system. Relying on utterances and thoughts of the fictional characters as well as authorial comments, there are numerous synonyms to be looked for. Rokeach originally pointed to Anderson's (1968) list of no less than 555 personality traits, and later authors such as Mueller (1974) and recently Farcane et al. (2019) in a study of values associated with corporate social responsibility have elaborated on definitions and synonyms of the 18+18 values.

When readers lack access to texts analysed by researchers, concerns with the reliability and validity of the analysis often dictate that e.g. interview transcripts are fully coded. Published narratives is another matter and should not require full coding if not digitally available, since they are accessible to any reader, who will be able to assess the quality of the narrative analysis. Coding of interview transcripts does not compensate for inadequate source critique and failing to check the trustworthiness of interview material (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020). Again, as Rhodes & Brown (2005) have contended, there will be fictional elements in what is reported.

An initial challenge for identifying works of fiction dealing with the management of construction projects is that the expression “construction project management” is a comparatively new term as well as “project management” in general (Garel, 2013). This is also the case with “construction project manager”. Searching for words actually used by authors over the years, such as “works”, “buildings”, or more specifically e.g. “bridges” lead to very many hits, which makes it difficult to approach a corpus such as that of Google Books (cf. Moretti, 2013). Combining construction terms with the word “novel” (noun) when searching for publications is inefficient because of the much more frequent use of the word as an adjective referring to innovative practices. An exception to the general lack of relevant bibliographies is the one by Burns (2005) covering US railroad literature.

### 3. Method

The method applied here consists of five steps. The first step has been to define the criteria for selecting a number of literary works where construction project management figures prominently. Once a set of twenty works have been identified, short plots have been written that highlight action that is relevant in a project management perspective. Each author's background and project inspiration as far as it is relevant to the text in question has been summarized. Next, the 18+18 individual values defined by Rokeach (1973) have been applied as a coding scheme to the chosen works, and finally, it is possible to see how each value is represented by the twenty authors and which values are occurring more frequently.

The criteria for including a work of fiction in this survey is that they are novels, short stories or plays where at least one construction project figures prominently and also a construction project manager. These works must be available in English, French or German: thus, e.g., the Finnish construction novels by Päätaalo are excluded while Paasilinna is included, and likewise omitted are the Soviet construction project proletarian novels, appearing as early as in 1918 (Collins, 1998) and continuing to be published in the 1920s and 1930s (Nicholas, 2010; Clark, 2017). The work must not be only a small fragment such as Jane Austen's *Sanditon*. There is a difficult question of distinguishing between architects and construction project managers, and earlier, the roles have often been combined; having reached the twentieth century, it is easier to see that Roark in Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* is principally an architect with little control of building activities, therefore not included here.

A total of twenty works of literature (fifteen novels, two short stories and four plays) have been selected and analysed, partly based on those identified already by Florman (1994), Eriksen (2001) and Burns (2005), then checked against relevant works written by authors awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (= Kipling in 1907, Lagerlöf 1909, Pontoppidan 1917, Andrić 1961 and Golding 1983). Waldo's (1968) pioneering analysis of over 150 administrative novels includes Boule's *River Kwai*, which recurs in McCurdy's (1973) overview of administrative fiction. Only one work by ancient Greek and Roman authors, Aristophanes' *The Birds*, is included here; Lehner (2009) mentions Aristophanes, although it is remarkable how seldom the theatre and plays have been exploited in organizations research, despite the frequent use by researchers of implicit theatrical metaphors such as the term “actor”. The list is not meant

to be exhaustive; Ken Follett's *Pillars of the Earth* is a further example of medieval cathedral building, following in Golding's footsteps.

For each of the twenty works of fiction, a short description of the plot is given, intended to highlight what is relevant from a project management viewpoint. There is also a brief account of actual projects as sources of inspiration and authors' own experiences, added for each text as a background since the fictional projects and fictional managers do not appear to be pure products of imagination. This background information has been gathered from easily accessible biographies of authors and other secondary sources.

Closer reading of project relevant parts of the texts, looking for salient words and phrases according to the Rokeach values, has made it possible to assign each work to the values in evidence. Sometimes a general impression of the presence of a certain value is indicated in [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) only by mentioning the name of the author.

#### 4. The stories

The selected twenty works of literature are presented here in chronological order according to year of publication in the original language. For each work, and as mentioned, a brief description is given of the plot seen in a project perspective, followed by an indication of the real-life project background and inspiration for each author. Very few of the authors if any had a first-hand experience as managers of construction projects.

Aristophanes: *Birds* (414 BC)

Play. Two elderly men wish to escape from Athens with its restlessness and lawsuits. They meet birds and suggest a city in the air; they are welcomed and transformed into two birds. One is sent up in the air with instructions, materials and equipment for building the city. Expert consultants also arrive, one of which, Meton, proposes to draw an urban plan, but he is thrown out "as all charlatans" by the birds. Once built, the city wall and the activities of its construction are described. Ends with the triumphal marriage of Peisetairos, the hero. Background: Herodotus' description of the walls of Babylon; Hippodamus as urban planner, who also appears in Aristotle's *Politics*.

Shakespeare: *Henry IV Part 2* (1600)

Play. From Act I, Scene iii (Lord Bardolph speaking). Prudence, reducing uncertainty, in an uprising is recommended, with a building metaphor expanded from Luke 14:28-30 (what is required of a disciple of Christ; probably based on building of watchtowers in ancient Judea). Background: Percy rebellion against Henry IV, 1405; author's involvement (?) in rebuilding of New Place, Stratford.

Goethe: *Faust II* (1832)

Play. In old age, Faust envisions a new kingdom on reclaimed land. Mephistopheles accedes. Faust has been reminded by Philemon and Baucis (their innocence, piety, the sound of their chapel bell) of values he had once held. Treated by Goethe as project stakeholders, this elderly pair is taken from Ovid, who has the gods rebuilding their poor home as a temple. But in *Faust II*, the pair and their chapel are annihilated, all is artificial land afterwards. Faust wishes the crew of lemurs/zombies to dig canals draining the marshland, and the supervisor (=Mephistopheles) is to mobilize them with incentives for digging and to submit daily progress reports. Faust is now blind, however, and the lemurs are actually digging his grave. His intentions for a safe area where millions of happy people would work exceed his strength. Background: Author appointed chair of the Weimar road commission, 1779; North Sea floods with severe loss of life, 1825.

Herman Bang: *Stucco* (1887)

Novel. Construction of major theatre complex reflects the upbeat mood of the entire city of Copenhagen. Wealth is shown to be an illusion; the sponsor is bankrupted. Learns humility. Author's moral: the future does not lie in extravagant plans; the country will have to learn to be small, after the 1864 Danish defeat in the war against Prussia. Background: Hans (Hellig) Hansen and the construction of Dagmarteatret, followed by his bankruptcy in 1884.

Henrik Ibsen: *The Master Builder* (1892)

Play. At the end of the play, Solness, the self-taught architect with church projects behind him, begins ascent to the top of the steeples with a wreath when he loses his footing and crashes to his death. There is a dependence on supernatural luck and hypnotic powers; a complex romantic relationship and rampant artistic ambition are portrayed. Background: Author's own literary career and personal relationships, lived in Munich for a total of eleven years; construction of the huge St. Michael's Church, Munich, where the first tower collapsed in 1590.

Rudyard Kipling: *The Bridge-Builders* (1893)

Short story. Construction of a lattice-girder bridge over the Ganges. River rising, the engineer takes opium. There is a vision of deities who have opposed the project, but the bridge survives, as the engineer. Background: Author covered as journalist several major Indian bridge openings in 1887, primarily the one of the Sutlej Bridge.

Selma Lagerlöf: *The Miracles of Antichrist* (1897)

Novel. Donna Micaela is behind the initiative for a railway around Etna. There is an emphasis on financing and organization, but also on getting her Gaetano back (love). The conflict between Christian and socialist value systems is explored. The project is endangered by the prospect of industrial action and organized crime. Background: Author's Sicilian travels 1895-96; narrow-gauge Ferrovia Circumetnea around Etna built 1889-95; Pope Leo XIII, 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

Henrik Pontoppidan: *Lucky Per (A Fortunate Man)* (1898-1904)

Novel. A personal fate: young man educated as civil engineer wishes to conquer the world, with a huge plan for transforming Jutland, draining marshes and opening canals, but successively turning inwards and ending his career as a lonely road inspector. Individual success versus provincial Christianity. Background: Author left his Copenhagen civil engineering education unfinished, 1879.

August Strindberg: *The Tale of the St. Gotthard* (1903)

Short story. A Swiss foreman from Ticino working on the challenging St. Gotthard tunnel project is exalted at the final breakthrough. His love has waited for him during eight years in Göschenen (Uri), and he comes through the mountain as he had promised. Background: Author lived in Switzerland in the 1880s; construction of the St. Gotthard tunnel, 1872-1880.

Harold Bell Wright: *The Winning of Barbara Worth* (1911)

Novel. The chief engineer of a company intent on diverting the Colorado River arrives and falls in love with Barbara. His greedy employer, meanwhile, refuses to spend the money to reinforce his gigantic water project. This results in a catastrophic flood. Barbara is impressed by his heroism, and he promises to return to marry her after he has conquered the Colorado River and turned the desert into a paradise. Background: The inflow of water to the Salton Sea from the Colorado River, accidentally created by the engineers of the California Development Company in 1905.

Willa Cather: *Alexander's Bridge* (1912)

Novel. A construction engineer in Boston is a world-renowned builder of bridges. Married, he resumes his acquaintance with a former love. He is having trouble with a bridge in Canada but leaves nevertheless for London, visits his love and tells her he cannot go on having two relationships. Later, she receives a letter, saying he is going mad away from her. This prompts her to visit him in America to tell him she will marry another man; they spend one last evening together. A colleague calls him to Canada to inspect the bridge. He discovers that one of the lower chords is failing. His colleague, concerned not to halt construction, had attempted to contact him earlier – the day he was with his former love. As the engineer is on the bridge stopping the work crews, the bridge collapses, killing many of the workers and the engineer himself. Background: Perhaps the 1907 first collapse of the Quebec bridge into the St Lawrence river, with 75 workers killed.

Francis Lynde: *David Vallory* (1919)

Novel. Young and idealistic railroad engineer has been called home to Middleboro from his engineering job in Florida, where he works on a great concrete railroad bridge. His boss enlists him in a ruse to make

use of low-grade cement. At first, he is shocked to learn that he has been used to cheat the railroad, but then settles and thinks that he has grown in his understanding of business. He is slow to see how he has been corrupted. There is a romantic subplot. Background: Author was a Union Pacific Railroad employee for 13 years before becoming a writer.

Ivo Andrić: *The Bridge on the Drina* (1945)

Novel. A harsh, violent and pitiless bridge builder, who has a peasant impaled, is recalled by the Vezir whose funds he has embezzled. He is replaced by another builder who is honest, confident and good-humoured. The project grows to include a caravanserai. Background: Written in Belgrade under the German occupation; the Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge in Višegrad, constructed in the 1570s.

Pierre Boulle: *The Bridge over the River Kwai* (1952)

Novel. British prisoners-of-war being forced by the Japanese to build a bridge for the Death Railway. In spite of conventions, officers are forced to do manual labour. A British colonel, proud perfectionist and military snob, torn between patriotism and pride, collaborates with the Japanese colonel. Prisoners strive to establish their superiority through the construction project, and they place explosives under the water level. Ultimately, the British colonel falls down on the detonator and so blows up the bridge. Background: Author an engineer, captured as secret agent with the Free French in Singapore and subjected to forced labour; WWII construction of the Kanchanaburi bridge in Thailand.

A. den Doolaard: *The Land behind God's Back* (1956)

Novel. An engineer who has studied engineering in Italy is building a bridge over the Tara Gorge in Montenegro, his home country. He loves Italian Giulia. Soon after completion, WWII breaks out, and he blows up the bridge to prevent it from German use. Caught, he was ordered to rebuild it, but refused, was killed and later hung from Tara Gorge as a warning. Background: Author's experiences from years in Yugoslavia; the fate of Lazar Jauković, who had before the war been involved in the planning of the Tara Gorge bridge and blew up one of its arches in 1942.

William Golding: *The Spire* (1964)

Novel. The Dean of the cathedral has a vision of a great spire, although the master-builder doubts that the foundations are adequate. The Dean's obsession and pride blinds him to reality, and he neglects his duties as dean. He is tormented by attraction to a servant's wife, who then has an affair with the master-builder. Increasingly irrational, the Dean succumbs to illness, and the spire remains incomplete at the end. Background: Tower of Salisbury Cathedral (404 ft), finished in 1320.

Arto Paasilinna: *A Happy Man* (1976)

Novel. A skilful engineer is to replace the parish's old wooden bridge with a concrete one. Known to be a fair and honest boss, he gets along well with his wife. The parish council is sceptical and suspects him of dubious fraternization with workers; a campaign is launched to catch him out. He refuses to surrender, challenging the parish council and school headmaster, whom he cuckolds; then he ignores the gossip. He is a champion of direct action who leads a harmonious life with two wives. Subject to (good) luck. Background: Author's upbringing in Finnish Lapland; father policeman.

Peter Ackroyd: *Hawksmoor* (1985)

Novel. Two intertwined murder stories, one featuring a satanist clerk of works or supervisor responsible for building seven churches in 18th-century London. The other story concerns the same churches and a 1980s detective. Background: Career of Nicholas Hawksmoor (d. 1736) as assistant to Christopher Wren and supervising architect.

Jan Guillou: *Bridge Builders* (2011)

Novel. Two engineer brothers, one on a major railway project in Norway, the other in German East Africa, also into railway construction. Irony of technology progress and colonization not bringing happiness to humanity. A number of indigenous stakeholders shot. Railway construction shown as a manhood test for young engineers; there is fear, courage and love. Background: Author's grandfather educated as civil engineer in Dresden, owner of contractor business; construction of Bergen Railway Line, inaugurated in 1909.

Éric Reinhardt: *The Victoria System* (2011)

Novel. The protagonist, trained as an architect, now the manager of the construction of France's tallest tower (Uranus, 130 m) on the fringes of La Défense, the capital's business district. As a hands-on director of works for the project he is under pressure from his superiors to get the building finished on schedule. There is a two-month delay, which he manages to reduce, energized by his extramarital relationship with Victoria, a business executive; essential for the novel is this romance which ends with her being murdered. Background: Planning of Tour Incity, an office skyscraper project in Lyon; neoliberalism.

## 5. Findings

There is a widely varying set of individual values represented by the twenty works of fiction analysed in Tables 1 and 2. Salient words or parts of phrases are quoted for a number of authors; works that leave a more general reflection of a value are indicated only by the author's name. It should be noted that an author may highlight a certain value sometimes by describing a character as deficient in that respect, which is shown in the tables by italicizing the name of the author and the quotation, if any.

According to the number of works displaying a clear reflection of particular values, the top five values are Imagination, (Mature) Love, Ambition, Courage and Happiness. These are closely followed by Capability and Sense of Accomplishment. Contributing to the profile of fictional project managers, the other end of the scale, with no author or only one underlining the value, comprises Equality, Pleasure, Family Security, A Comfortable Life, Cleanliness, Self-Control, Broad-Mindedness, Logic and Forgiveness. The works of each of five authors (Goethe, Ibsen, Pontoppidan, Golding and Reinhardt) illustrate at least four of the five values more frequently mentioned; both treatments by Ibsen and Pontoppidan are understood to depend on Goethe's Faust story. The broad range of values that these five authors were able to exhibit may reflect their being mature and experienced (Goethe was in his eighties) as well as the length of the four novels; short stories concentrate on fewer values. The complexity of major construction projects may explain the fact that only two of the twenty authors, Cather and Andrić, chose a construction setting for launching their careers as novelists.

As construction projects belong to different categories, the question arises whether there are patterns of values that more or less correspond to type of project. The twenty works of fiction deal with projects concerning buildings (four novels and two plays) and infrastructure (ten novels, two short stories and two plays). Across the twenty works, it is possible to see that most authors are drawn to large projects, and only three texts refer clearly to smaller ventures. There is a concentrated period cluster of seven works dealing with infrastructure projects beginning with Kipling's 1893 short story and ending in 1919. This cluster reflects public awareness of highly visible heavy engineering projects carried out around the turn of the century. High visibility is also a characteristic of the church tower projects (Ackroyd, Golding, Ibsen) as well as Reinhardt's office tower. Bridges are central to many of the stories, sometimes as successfully constructed (Kipling, Andrić, Paasilinna, Guillou), of a dubious quality (Lynde), and they collapse spectacularly in three cases: one accidentally (Cather) and two intentionally in wartime (Boulle, den Doolaard). Distinguishing between success or failure of the principal character and that of the project, there are a few projects which are described as successful whereas the project manager is subject to a personal failure. Railway projects occur (Lagerlöf) with tunnels (Strindberg, Lynde, Guillou). Common to many of the projects is that they are chosen and described as including risks with high potential impacts.

Stakeholder relations figure in several works, and then typically where the front end of projects is included in the story. Influential stakeholders often belong to the financial community, and these tend to be characterized as greedy and dishonest. Citizen protests against infrastructure projects are rarely found in the twenty fictional treatments, and Goethe's elderly pair who are oppressed lack a voice, although Faust is



stricken with remorse. Fictional stakeholders may include supernatural forces, as set in motion by Goethe and Kipling.

Ethical dilemmas where individual values clash with organizational values are conspicuous in the novels written by Cather, Wright and Lynde, all published in the US in the 1910s. The three project managers found there appear to undergo changes in their individual values over time, but this can be interpreted as only a reordering of their permanent values due to their experiences and the social contexts where they have been active. When Obedience as an instrumental value is highlighted by an author, there are usually ethical issues to be found in one or more stakeholder relations. Ackroyd has portrayed a project manager who is an obedient villain and whose individual values strongly contrast with values held in society.

## 6. Discussion

Considering the five individual values more frequently found in the twenty works studied here, the fictional manager emerges even less as a rational technician than real life managers (Cicmil, 2006). In this respect, this study can be seen as a logical further step which advances studies of the actuality of projects (Cicmil et al., 2006), following upon the biographical turn taken by Sankaran (2018) for construction project management and widening the scope of fiction in organizational studies after the initiative taken by Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux in 1994. Regardless of whether biographies and autobiographies of project managers contain elements of fiction or not, they may consciously or subconsciously emphasize favourable values and traits, potentially suffering from censorship and self-censorship, conscious or subconscious. Pure fiction should allow an author to explore events and values without such inhibitions and may therefore be psychologically richer and truer. The degree of truth is increased when a work of fiction is not pure imagination; the twenty authors have been shown to have had relevant personal experiences and sometimes spent great efforts on understanding the management of construction projects.

Out of Czarniawska's (2020) five reasons why organization scholars should engage with fiction, the second reason, that they offer insights into human nature, is where the focus of the present investigation lies. Additionally, the twenty works of fiction studied here do allow us to follow practices where fieldwork would be difficult not least for ethical reasons, and Ackroyd's thoroughly evil project manager is a case of a bold thought experiment. Only few of the twenty literary works are set in contemporary society; nevertheless, they may shape the reader's ability to interpret "contemporary societal problems" by way of contrast. Taking fiction seriously could be one way to perform project research with a potential for contributions beyond the project domain (Jacobsson and Söderholm, 2020).

Although the present analysis is directed towards the values held by project managers, individual values attributed to project stakeholders are revealed in many of the twenty works, and clearly so where the early stages, the front end, of an infrastructure project are described (cf. Martinsuo et al., 2019). To take one example, Pontoppidan's *Per* navigates among businessmen, bankers, newspapers and politicians who display various combinations of Self-Respect, National Security, (lack of) Courage and (lack of) Honesty. As stressed by Cicmil and Gaggiotti (2018), the project manager is also a participant in these complex relational processes, "rather than an objective observer standing outside of the collaborative action". The three novels by Wright, Cather and Lynde illustrate the risk the project manager runs as participant in organizations that engage in corrupt practices. The fictional accounts used by Ljungblom and Lennerfors (2018) describe ethical problems which appear to be small in comparison with what can be found in more imaginative literary works dealing with construction projects and also in the real world (Ho, 2011).

When Wang et al. (2017) asked US construction managers to rate Rokeach's 18 instrumental values, they found that Honesty, Responsibility, Capability, Logic and Independence received the five highest

scores, while Imagination and Love came closer to the bottom of the scale (=Obedience). This is in stark contrast to what has been found here: none of the top five values identified by the twenty authors of fiction are among the five values prioritized by their US respondents. When comparing these outcomes it should be noted that the US survey results might be biased, as only one in ten responded, and self-assessed values might suffer from distortions akin to what can be expected from autobiographies by project managers. Drouin (2021) characterizes the megaproject manager she interviewed as exhibiting the values of Team Spirit and Solidarity, Integrity, Honesty, and Humility. Again, Honesty is highly ranked, and this manager can be thought to engage in what has been called servant leadership (Xu & Wang, 2020).

Honesty-Humility in the HEXACO traits model of personality appears to be associated with a negative effect on creativity (Silvia et al., 2011), and creativity is linked to imagination. In fact, imagination is seldom mentioned by those who study managers in temporary organizations, and then typically because 'Vision and imagination' is one of the intellectual dimensions in the leadership questionnaire designed by Dulewicz and Higgs (2005). When Podgórska and Pichlak (2019) relied on this questionnaire in their study of how project success is related to project manager leadership competencies, their respondents listed "vision and imagination, intuitiveness and empowering" as the least important competencies.

As a genre, novels tend to include at least an element of romantic love, and most authors can be suspected of exaggerating the Rokeach values of Love and Mature Love. Scholars investigating the external relationship management for project managers (Meng & Boyd, 2017) have avoided probing individual relations of a romantic nature. Love has been mentioned in the context of affect-based trust (Wong et al., 2008), while Tasselli (2019) recently has argued for the study of love within organizations. Furthermore, love emerges among the family values leading to successful project managers, at least in Greece (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2020). Project managers in the twenty fictional treatments analysed here sometimes find their management activities energized by love, be it extramarital or not. The romantic relations then concern women outside the project organization, although a stakeholder can be involved as in Lagerlöf's Sicilian story. The absence of project internal romance can be attributed to the historical settings where the role of women in society was narrowly circumscribed. Love in these works of fiction offers examples of mitigating the opposition between happiness/efficacy and meaning/integrity, analysed by McGregor and Little (1998) in relation to 'personal projects'; for a majority of protagonists, the personal project coalesces with the construction project, and thus efficacy and integrity (or happiness and meaning) are not in obvious conflict.

If Imagination and Love are values that stand out in fiction, and although the remaining three top values (Ambition, Courage, Happiness) are in evidence in many of the stories but not in all, the typical project manager in fiction is not necessarily an individualistic hero. In his foreword to the portraits by Middlemas (1963, p. 14) of Victorian project managers, Asa Briggs considered them to be "heroes of self-help", while he at the same time interpreted them as "individualists whose finished work was a collective achievement", an insight that reveals a more balanced view of vertical and horizontal leadership (Graham et al., 2020). Among the six major projects analysed by Shapira and Berndt (1997), a majority had identifiable champions, but the authors failed to find decision making as "a particular 'heroic' moment"; although John Roebling "worked in a more solitary mode, and was not overly concerned with consensus building" for the Brooklyn Bridge, Joseph Strauss was "able to surround himself with men of high caliber" for the Golden Gate Bridge. Considering the managers depicted in the twenty fictional works analysed here, it is hard to determine whether they displayed authentic leadership or not, unlike the situation when a present-day megaproject manager labels himself as an authentic leader (Sergeeva & Davies, 2021).

The projects found in the twenty works analysed here are spread over many centuries and regions: Europe, Africa, Asia and North America, representing several cultures, although sometimes from outsider au-

thorial viewpoints. [Gerald & Söderlund \(2018\)](#) apply to project studies Habermas' tripartite view of knowledge-constitutive interests, where the present investigation relies on the interpretive or cultural hermeneutic sciences. Moreover, this investigation belongs to their category of micro project studies with its focus on individual behaviour and in particular on the role of individual values. Since project management fiction reflects a variety of periods and settings, the outcome might "challenge and impact our understanding of individual and social behaviour". The 18+18 values identified by [Rokeach \(1973\)](#) are American values of their time and culture, but they have been found to be applicable also in other cultural contexts ([Hofstede & Bond, 1984](#); [Chipulu et al., 2014](#); [Schwartz, 2017](#)). Cultural differences surface in the shape of different hierarchies of values.

## 7. Conclusion

Relying on an analysis of fourteen novels, two short stories and four plays, this study of how construction project management and managers have been treated by authors is the first to explore fictional representation of individual values in temporary organizations. This should contribute to the successive broadening of research into project management, from a focus on management methods that are intended to lead to successful project outcomes to an acceptance project managers as human beings, having their individual sets of values, facing ethical dilemmas and balancing project commitments with external personal commitments.

Any such expansion of the field of research is challenged if limited to gaining access to empirical data from real projects and their managers. Sources to knowledge of values held, such as questionnaire responses and project manager autobiographies, can be suspected of social bias. Professional identities and traditional views of what constitutes good project management may downplay reporting of softer values such as imagination and love. The standpoint that fictional characters should be excluded from psychology as involving a flawed empirical method ought not to disqualify them from delivering insights to project managers and project management researchers. It is possible to obtain a richer representation of conflicts between individual values, between individual and organizational values, as well as between individual, organizational and social values. Ethical issues can be highlighted through fiction. At least, the study of fictional characters can serve to make project management researchers who rely on survey data more aware of how their own values and emotions might affect the range of questions they would like to ask and also influence their subsequent analysis of survey responses.

In many cases, as shown here, authors of fiction have spent great efforts on understanding construction projects and raising the quality of how they describe characters. Authors of project management fiction have got their ideas from their own experiences and what they have heard and read. The standard disclaimer of any resemblance to living or dead persons sometimes rings false. One reason why authors have inserted historical distance to their stories can be the risk of legal complications if characters are easily identifiable by their contemporaries.

### 7.1. Implications

Project management fiction can be understood as a useful complement to the project success literature in organizational research. The literary treatments allow painting a coherent psychological picture of individual value systems and their consequences, sometimes negative for the outcome of projects. This escapes the risk of narrowness due to researcher reluctance to include sensitive topics in interviews or questionnaires, as this can lead to conscious or subconscious underreporting of conflicts and ethical complications.

Moreover, works of fiction can be used in project management education and also be suggested in reading lists for active project managers to broaden their perspectives, just like historical studies of real

projects. University curricula can be modified to encourage a more realistic view of how values generate behaviour in projects and of clashes between individual and organizational values, which seldom are in focus in textbooks and underlying organizational research. For active project managers, reading literary works can be more attractive than studying research publications. Fiction can be useful for both project managers and project stakeholders to deepen their understanding and ability to detect early signs of value conflicts with project consequences.

### 7.2. Limitations and future research directions

The choice of construction project management rather than project management in general is a limitation, albeit one that has permitted a long historical view of fiction, as the spread of project management to domains other than construction is a more recent development if we disregard capturing Troy and other more or less fictional military ventures. The construction stories analysed here reflect the cultural context of where and when they were written, seeing that there is also a variety of geographical settings for the fictional projects. While this is another and obvious source of limitations, it is also an advantage considering how easy it is to recognize odd worldviews, cultures and moral principles not shared by today's readers and everywhere. There are only two female authors among the twenty, and there is only one story devoted to female leadership: Selma Lagerlöf's Donna Micaela, who pursues her railway initiative. Paradoxically, when the reader is made aware of glaring prejudice and the contextual basis for socially constructed phenomena, the study of these fictional treatments can sharpen perceptions and have an emancipatory effect.

Another limitation which nevertheless can be valuable is that the project technologies might be obsolete, despite the relative slowness of technology change in construction. Obsolescence is a reminder of how project management practice has been, and probably will be in the future, affected particularly by advances in information and communication technologies. To take just one example, the collapse of the Canadian bridge in Willa Cather's novel would have been averted with better telecommunications.

There are several issues that should be added to the research agenda. The successive widening of project research interest from internal relations to external relations, primarily to project stakeholders, can be expanded to studying the effects of a wider set of personal relations of project participants. This includes the effects of love, inside and outside the project organization, something which only recently has caught researcher attention. Another question which needs more attention is the role of imaginative project managers in projects and in relation to stakeholders. Corruption and other serious ethical issues require more analysis than has been usual among researchers of the project management community, restricted as they have traditionally been by the empirical survey methods. Furthermore, the relation between individual values, personality traits and virtue ethics is a promising field to explore, injecting new ideas into the study of project success factors. As to methodology, a smaller selection of texts or excerpts of texts than in this first study would allow more intensive analysis of how authors have portrayed psychological aspects of project management.

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None.

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